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Children of the Blade: the Unforgotten



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Chapter 1 by Stan Johnson

Sarah Kerrigan Raynor had the ability to manipulate matter with her mind. She had seen worlds without number, had flown amongst thousands of them. She had had her humanity stripped away by the Overmind, only to regain it, then surrender it again when it became clear that she was the key to defeating the dark god Amon. And to do it, she had become a deity herself.

None of that compared to what she was doing right here, right now.

The pressure on her pelvis was staggering, and she was grateful she was already on her hands and knees. A stuttering groan forced its way out of her throat, and, kneeling on a thin mat laid over the decking of her new husband's ship, she felt even more primal than she had in the chrysalis that had renewed her zerg form years ago.

A strong hand pressed gently, but firmly on her tailbone, and the pressure she felt eased considerably, but not completely. She'd been at this for over an hour, and while she could *feel* the end was approaching, it also felt as though this would *never* end.

"Easy now, darling," said the voice she'd heard even in her dreams. James Raynor, her ex-commander, her former enemy. He smiled at her. "Almost there."

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point—and suddenly, something gave. A guttural sigh surged from deep within her and a weight that seemed greater than the burden she'd carried as the Queen of Blades fell from her.

"Well I'll be," Jim said, his tone wondrous. "Don't that just beat all?" His hand came up along her back. "It's a little girl. A darlin' little girl, just like her momma."

Pressure assaulted Sarah again. "Jim, this isn't finished." She doubled over again, muscles contracting hard.

"Just relax, darlin'. I've got our little one. You just take care—"

"*Will you just shut up?*" More than anything, she wanted this to be over, not so much for the physical relief, anymore, but because she wanted to hold her new child. And yet, she knew the placenta was yet to come. But who knew the afterbirth would be as all-consuming as birth itself?

She shuddered and groaned again and again, forcing herself to relax as best she could. Her ghost training had taught her how to avoid pain by avoiding muscle tension, and while birth was more work than she'd *ever* done as a professional killer, she was surprised at how well her relaxation training kept any pain at bay. And still, the pressure went on, her moans mingling with the newborn cries of her daughter. And then, something *e/se* shifted.

"Sarah? Sarah!" Excitement rang in Jim's voice. "It's a boy! We've got twins!"

A wave of relief flooded her veins, and she allowed herself to collapse on to her side. Jim was kneeling over her in a heartbeat, each arm bearing a tiny infant. "They're *beautiful* Sarah. By golly, look at what we've done. Ain't it incredible?"

A feeling more desirable than all the power of the Xel'Naga enveloped her as she laid eyes on the pair of tiny forms in her husband's arms. Wet and naked and wriggling, cords still attached, the babies were more wondrous to her than the galaxies she'd once surveyed.

"Lemme help you into bed, darlin'," Jim said, shifting their newborn son into the crook of his arm, next to their girl. His strong hand was on her shoulder, lifting her off the hard floor, and guiding her onto the comfortable bed.

"Jim," she said, accepting the twins from him, "it's a miracle. We did it."

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"Naw, you did all the work," he said, smiling.

"This is *our* victory, Jim," she pressed, smiling herself.

He conceded with a nod. "Lemme grab you something to eat, real quick. I don't want to miss a moment of these little ones."

Sarah put gratitude in her smile, then turned her attention to her new children. Sarah Kerrigan Raynor. A *mother*. Who would ever have believed it?

The recycled air of the dropship was stale, but felt heavenly as it evaporated the sheen of sweat covering her whole body. A rush of emotion par nothing spiraled and soared in her mind as she put each baby to breast, thrilled that they latched so naturally. Jim returned in short order with a small tray of food and a pouch of fruit juice. She waved off the food—it still smelled funny even after pregnancy—but she took the juice, and savored it. When she handed the empty pouch back to Jim, he leaned down and kissed her softly.

"I love you, Sarah. You were worth walking through Hell for."

"And across Char," she said, teasing. Something flickered in his eyes, and she tensed at the look of pain there. It was gone in a moment, his smile back in place. "I'm sorry, Jim," she said. "That was insensitive of me."

He shook his head with a small chuckle. "Different times, darlin'. Different times." His eyes grew distant for a moment, and then he was in the present again. "We've got ourselves a *family*, and that's all that matters. You, me, and these two precious dumplin's." He hesitated. "Ah, we'd best be figurin' out some names for 'em. Can't go callin' 'em 'Baby Boy' and 'Baby Girl' all the time."

"Whatever we chose, we will *not* chose 'Jim,'" Sarah said.

"Aw, c'mon," he replied. "What's wrong with namin' our boy after his old man?"

Sarah gave him a mock frown. "There's only enough room in this universe for one James Raynor, cowboy!"

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do to keep the birth the simple, intimate affair it had been. She knew that would only last for so long; visitors were probably lining up outside the dropships hatch before the kids had even emerged. Then again, maybe not. Jim had been acting strangely since they got here; he'd even landed the dropship a good half kilometer from the main colony. When she'd asked him about it the day they'd landed, his eyes said everything. "They all know me, but they can't know who *you* are, Sarah. None of them have forgotten..."

Of course none of them had forgotten. How could they? She'd led marauding hordes of nightmarish creatures on a rampage across the entire sector, razing worlds, slaughtering billions. Though she felt she'd paid a redeeming price by taking upon her the mantle of the Xel'Naga, and risking her very *existence* to save all of creation from Amon... *she* would never forget either.

A woman's voice, tinny and distorted, filtered from the comm, and Jim answered. After some brief pleasantries, he cut the channel, and turned back to his wife. "Doc's here," he said, an odd note in his voice. "She wants to check on the kids."

Sarah half-smiled. She was reticent to let this beautiful, intimate moment end, but she also valued the opinion of trained medical personnel, now that she'd finished birthing and reached a place where doctors might actually be of use. "Sure," she said. "Let him and his nurse in."

"Um," Jim said, scratching at the back of his neck. "It's a 'she,' and she came alone."

Sarah squinted. "Is there something you're not telling me, Jim?"

He didn't answer, but instead triggered the hatch release. From deep in the bowels of the ship, Sarah heard the hiss and groan of the hydraulics as they lowered the ramp into place. The echo of metallic footsteps followed.

"We're in here, Doc," Jim called, glancing back at Sarah. He looked uncomfortable. Almost... guilty.

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momentarily, before flicking between Sarah and Jim. The doctor's jaw bunched almost imperceptibly, and she seemed to stand a little straighter.

"Ah, hey, Doc," Jim began—and was he starting to perspire? What was going on?—"This is my lovely, ah, wife... Sarah. Sarah Raynor. And these two cute little things joined us this side of half an hour back."

The doctor's eyebrow quirked, and she stepped forward stiffly, almost as if being forced. Sarah expected the woman to extend her hand, but she didn't. Instead, she looked back at Jim—and for a little longer than Sarah cared for—then returned her attention to the new mother and her twins.

"Good morning, Missus Raynor," the doctor said, her words clipped, almost cold.

"Congratulations on your new children. I'd be happy to take a look at them, see if they're all right."

Sarah tried not to narrow her eyes. "That's fine," she said, detaching them from where they suckled. "I'm sorry, but I didn't catch your name."

Jim cleared his throat and quickly moved to her side. "My fault, darlin'." Gesturing at the doctor, he kept his eyes locked on Sarah, almost desperately. "Sarah? Meet Doctor Ariel Hansen. Chief researcher and field physician for this colony.

Something deep inside Sarah told her she was destined to hate this woman.

Chapter 2 by Stan Johnson



It was sometime later that Ariel Hansen found herself hurrying away from the ebon dropship belonging to the former leader of Raynor's Raiders. She tried to blame her shallow breathing and sweating palms on the steamy jungle the colony was nestled in. How long had it been since she'd seen him? Had watched the legendary James Raynor in action, up close and personal? And the only thanks she'd been able to give him, after he'd saved her new colony from certain

extinction at the hands of the Protoss had been a small kiss on the cheek.

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She knew she should have gone for his lips. She should have taken that chance to show him her true feelings. Maybe then he would have taken her on to lead. Yes, he was an insanely busy man whose actions had ripple effects that touched millions, potentially even

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billions of lives. Yes, he was one-of-a-kind. But beneath it all, he was still human. And she had *seen* the goodness in him, barely buried beneath his rough, buckaroo exterior. Maybe he hadn't seen it, but Dr. Ariel Hansen *knew* that Jim Raynor was the best a man could be in all the right ways.

And a night hadn't passed since that he hadn't been in her dreams.

She shook her head clear of the thought, and shifted her grip on the shoulder strap of her medical bag. Inside were several small vials of blood drawn from...the newborns. She couldn't think of *who* those newborns belonged to.

"They're just babies," she muttered. "Cute, innocent twins with an angel for a father and a devil for a mother." Her blood boiled inside as she remembered the woman she'd found lying on the bed in Jim's dropship, a baby on each breast, and showing the clear signs of a woman who had just given birth. Though the woman's face was decidedly human, Ariel *knew* that the woman had once been something more. Something... else. Tears sprung into Ariel's eyes; not only had Jim abandoned her, he'd taken up with... with...

"Stop it, Ariel," she whispered, as she pushed through the last of the foliage separating Jim's landing site from the outskirts of the colony. "It wouldn't do to let the others see you this way. It was just a simple neo-natal checkup. Everything is fine." She knew she was lying to herself, but she had a reputation, in the colony, for calm, caring professionalism. If it took a mask of deceit to hide what was on her heart, and give her fellow colonists the Dr. Hansen they knew, then so be it.

As she stepped into the manmade perimeter clearing, the bunkers and missile turrets came into view. Though the Protoss had never returned after Jim had defeated their attempt to purge the world of the infected colonists, and the Zerg had only attacked twice, over the years—small raids, easily repelled at that—she took comfort in knowing the ruling council cared enough and was wise enough to have standing defenses.

She waved her free hand over her head in the customary signal that she was a friendly. Though she didn't so much as see the glint of a weapon, every bunker she could see would have eyes on her, and that the only way to draw the attention of the missile turrets would be scanning for any cloak. Of course, as every day, nothing happened, and she reached her lab only minutes later.

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A dark haired, Asian-cast male in his mid-twenties looked up from a microscope when she pushed through the door. A smile broke out on his face, and he straightened. "Good morning, Doctor Hansen."

Ariel gave him a polite smile and a wave. "Morning, Shen. How's the DNA mapping on the Flavi birds coming?" Shen had barely been out of his teens when the colonists first landed, and he was one of the unlucky who had contracted the Zerg virus. Ariel had personally attended to him—just as she had to all the rest—until a cure had been found and administered. Shen had been so grateful that he'd practically *begged* to become her research assistant. Though he was sometimes clumsy and still bore the awkwardness of youth, his mind was incredible, and he had a natural instinct for medicine. She had taken him on, trained him, and had never regretted her decision. Except that he seemed to have developed a crush on her.

Oh, Jim, she thought. Why couldn't you have just stayed?

"Ah," Shen said, brightening further. "The mapping is moving forward quite well. In fact, I found a ninety-two percent correlation..." She half tuned out his words, letting him drone on about things she would normally have been passionately interested in. Her mind was still stuck several kilometers out in the forest. Setting her bag carefully on the counter, she logged into her computer and began her daily routine.

"Doctor Hansen? Are you alright? Ariel?" She disliked when he got familiar with her. Yes, he was reasonably attractive, and they had a lot in common, but she had *no* interest in him that way. And how *could* she, when she'd been so close with—

"Shen, I need you to run full labs on these samples," she said, interrupting her own thoughts. Slipping the vials from her bag, she checked to ensure the labels hadn't smudged. Satisfied that her markings were still legible, she handed the vials to her assistant. "Our visitors have newborns."

Shen's eyebrows shot up. "Oh? You mean, there are several women on that dropship who gave birth at the same

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from the visit. It wasn't until she realised she could no longer see her notes through her tears that she paused for a break.

"Doctor Hansen?" It was Shen again.

She hurriedly dried her eyes, but only half turned toward him, pretending to study her notes.

"Done already, Shen?"

"I've been in there for an hour. Results should be coming through any moment" he said, trailing off. "Are you sure you're okay, Doctor?" She turned back to her computer, but felt his approach anyway. He placed a hand gently on her shoulder. She barely refrained from shrugging it off.

"There's something about newborns that gets me," she lied. "And I haven't been sleeping well lately." That much *hadn't* been a lie. Ever since she'd learned of Jim's pending arrival—and why hadn't he had the courtesy to contact her as well as Ground Control?—she hadn't been able to get much shut eye. The week since the colonial council had granted him permission to set down had left her haggard, struggling to focus.

Shen squeezed her shoulder, and it was all she could do to not throw his hand off; she knew he meant well, and she still had a façade to maintain. "Get some rest, Ariel," he said gently. "I'll hold down the fort." He gave another squeeze, then, blessedly, turned to leave. She glanced behind her, and watched him duck into the lab just as the tone announcing the results of the blood work began to warble. Ariel decided that her assistant had a point—she *did* need some rest. If nothing else, she'd have to pretend that the world was peachy when she went back to give Jim the news. But... couldn't she just call him on the comm? That would be so much easier, and it would certainly save her a trip. The jungles weren't so dangerous as to warrant her needing an escort, thankfully, but with the heat and humidity...

But no. She *had* to see him again, and in person. She wanted to be in his presence; feel his hand in hers even under the false pretext of "shaking hands"; breathe in that musky scent that was his alone. You couldn't get any of that over the comm. She groaned, and rose to leave.

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Two hours later, after checks, cross checks, and triple checks had been run, Ariel found herself sitting alone in her quarters. Never before had she had to face a decision of this magnitude. Inexplicable anger welled inside her. How *dare* Fate force this on her. How *dare* the universe make her the judge of who lived and who died, or saddle her with the mantle of justice. She was a *research physician*, not a sage. The logical solution was to present the findings of the tests to the colonial council and let *them* handle the weight of the task. They'd at least be relatively impartial about it. But she knew what would happen—either quarantine and brutal testing of both the newborns *and* their parents, or immediate, and probably permanent, eviction from the planet.

And that would mean Jim would leave her again.

She growled as a fresh wave of anger surged through her. Jim had *already* left her. And not only that, he had left her for *The Queen of Blades*. And now—now they had *children* together. How could he have betrayed humanity by letting that... that *monstrosity* continue to exist? Justice *demand*ed the woman die a most painful death for the unspeakable scope of agony she had caused the sector. How could Jim *not* see that? How could he not only allow her to live, but *sire progeny* with her? Was one Butcher of the Korpulu Sector insufficiently horrible for him that he felt the need to have *Children* of the Blade?

And that was the problem. Shen's test had shown that no matter what the Kerrigan woman appeared to be now, her past still clung to her like Tydarian cattle dung, thick and reeking. As a result her children were bound to be every bit as abominable as their mother; and the test results proved it. The children were infested with Zerg cells. It was only a matter of time before their humanity was subsumed under the overwhelming essence of those creatures of nightmare. And while she couldn't agree with the Protoss' attempted purge of an entire colony, she *fully* concurred that the Queen of the Zerg ought *never* to spread her legacy through reproduction.

Could she cure them? Probably. She may need to tweak her formula to account for Kerrigan's

genetic differences. But she had *animal cells* to try to ensure that the plague of the Zerg never returned to this world, or a *human* many lives could she save by simply ensuring the new *children* of the Blade were not *destined* for?

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She would contact the Council and report her findings. She would ensure Jim was inoculated against the Zerg virus. That queen b@!*h would be either exiled or, more appropriately, executed, and Jim would be free from whatever spell she had ensnared him with.

Jim Raynor would, at last, be hers.

She silenced the echoes of her conscience that screamed in the back of her head. This was the right thing to do, she knew it. She shoved aside the images of those precious, beautiful little infants, replacing them with visions of zerglings swarming across the colony, butchering other innocent children. It was the only way she could go through with what she was about to do.

Rising from her bed, she snatched her bag and her datapad with all the findings of Shen's tests. Setting her jaw, she turned for the door. A chime from the comm stopped her just before she stepped outside. Grimacing, she debated taking the call. The comm tone continued to buzz incessantly, and she gave in, muttering, and promising to keep things brief.

Composing her face—it was probably Shen on the other end, after all—she touched the “Accept Call” button. “Good afternoon, this is Doctor Hansen.”

The image that burned to life on the screen froze her blood. There stood Jim, his face almost literally glowing as she'd never seen it before. In each arm, a tiny, gorgeous little baby rested. One yawned in an unspeakably adorable way, and Ariel felt her heart melt.

“Heya, Doc,” Jim said. “I know this mornin' wasn't full of the kind'a hospitality we prefer, so these two little dumplin's and I would just like to make that up to you, seein' as you're an old friend, and you helped us out. What say you drop by the ship again—informal like. 'Sides, we still need to name these two. We're thinkin' about namin' this princess,” and he held forward one infant, “somethin' special. We're thinkin' about namin' her 'Ariel.'”

Dr. Hansen's heart leapt into her throat, and for several long moments she was completely unable to speak.

“Cat got your tongue, Doc?” Jim said, winking. Her heart did funny things to see that wink and other funny things to see Jim Raynor smile less. How could she even *think* of arranging their deaths? “I’ll be right back,” she promised. If only it hadn't been for that other woman.

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Then it hit her: the real problem—no, the *only* problem—was Sarah Kerrigan. A plan coagulated in her mind in an instant. A smile, not altogether pleasant, crept across her lips.

“That sounds wonderful, Jim. Give me some time to collect my things, and I’ll be right over.”

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